

U.S./USSR/
ARMS TALKS

MCWETHY: This is John McWethy. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, one of the least-noted casualties, the breakoff of U.S.-Soviet talks aimed at limiting weapons in space. Since then, there have been no such talks, and both superpowers have plunged into research that could create vast arsenals of weapons for space. Since 1968, the Soviet Union has been testing a weapon to destroy satellites, a rocket launched from earth. The Soviets have tested it more than two dozen times, and it works. The U.S. is just now getting around to testing its over version, a rocket launched from an F-15. But these antisatellite weapons are just the Model Ts of a developing new era. Both the Soviets and the U.S. are designing lasers and particle beams for use in space. And President Reagan envisions an entire 'Star Wars' weapon system that might one day protect the U.S. from all Soviet missiles, weapons that could destroy satellites as well, knocking out a military's communications and blinding its early warning system. A few months ago, President Reagan said he would not negotiate with the Russians on the issue of banning antisatellite weapons because he said such a treaty would be impossible to verify. The Soviets, so the argument goes, could launch all kind of things into space that look like satellites but were really weapons, and the U.S. would never know without inspections right at the launch pad. Not so, say many verifications experts. They claim if the president wants a treaty with the Russians he could sign one tomorrow and be relatively sure, with the intelligence-gathering tools that now exist, he would of any Soviet cheating very quickly. John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.